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S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 02 ANKARA 000647

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FOR AMBASSADOR SCHULTE FROM ROSS WILSON

E.O. 12958: DECL: 02/15/2021
TAGS: [AORC](#) [EUN](#) [IR](#) [KNNP](#) [PARM](#) [PREL](#) [TU](#)
SUBJECT: SCENESETTER FOR THE FEB 15- 17 VISIT OF AMB
SCHULTE TO TURKEY

REF: A. ANKARA 16

- [1](#)B. STATE 6236
- [1](#)C. ANKARA 188
- [1](#)D. STATE 14138

Classified By: Ambassador Ross Wilson for reasons (b), and (d).

[1](#)1. (S) Summary: Your visit to Ankara provides a welcome opportunity to accomplish two things in our Iran diplomacy: brief the Turks on what we know about Iran's nuclear weapons development efforts and consult with them on the way forward. Turkey is at best a reluctant supporter of the international consensus that now exists on Iran nuclear issues, and it feels acutely exposed and vulnerable - as it did on Iraq three years ago. Getting a clear picture of Iran's nuclear efforts will help to stiffen the Turkish spine on the substance. Consulting with Ankara will bolster the effectiveness of US engagement with Turkey on Iran in coming months and help to minimize frictions when they arise. End Summary.

Two Views of the Nuclear Issue

[1](#)2. (c) Turkey and Iran share a 310-mile border that has been peaceful for 600 years. Turkish analysts point out that this peace has been based on a balance of power between the two countries - one that would be fundamentally altered if Iran were to acquire nuclear weapons. The military and foreign policy establishment here are concerned about the dangers of the Iranian nuclear program. Turkish leaders have made clear their opposition to a nuclear-armed Iran. They have called upon Iran to adhere to all of its NPT commitments and to ensure that its peaceful nuclear programs are fully transparent and open to the IAEA. They have urged that Iran resume its dialogue with the EU-3

[1](#)3. (S) However, Turkey is at best a reluctant partner on Iran nuclear issue. The present government of pro-Islamist Justice and Development Party (AKP) PM Erdogan has placed emphasis on improving ties with Turkey's Islamic neighbors, including Iran. Before the IAEA voted to refer Iran to the UNSC, PM Erdogan told EU Ambassadors January 20 that he did not believe Iran intends to develop nuclear weapons. One of his key advisors had expressed the same view privately to us one day earlier. Less skeptical Turkish officials still stress to us the need to maintain dialogue and to identify a diplomatic solution; they abhor the idea of military action, and they do not like sanctions either, recognizing (correctly) that Turkey will be disproportionately harmed by them. Officials here value and do not wish to endanger the productive intelligence and border exchanges that take place

with Iran on the PKK, on drug trafficking and transnational crime. (That Iran has reportedly handed over 40 PKK activists has played well among elites here obsessed by the dangers of renewed PKK violence from northern Iraq and northwest Iran.) Turks also see Iran as an increasingly important trade partner and supplier of natural gas. Sensitivity about the Iran account has sometimes led to tepid Turkish responses on Iran issues - mostly notably when Ahmedinejad called for wiping Israel off the map. Turkey perhaps reluctantly deflected an Iranian wish for Ahmedinejad to visit Turkey in January, going against its leaders, pro-dialogue, pro-Islamist and sympathetic-to-Iran instincts, out of recognition that this would run so strongly counter to the international mainstream on Iran issues.

Turning Turkey Around

14. (C) Our recent efforts to stiffen Turkey's resolve and the messages it is passing to Iran include the following.

-- Ambassador used a January call on National Security Council Secretary-General Alpogan to urge Turkey to define what role it is ready to play in the diplomatic effort to deal with Iran's nuclear ambitions. The Secretary and U/S Burns both emphasized the importance of this issue during Alpogan's visit to Washington last month. Alpogan indicated that Ankara is concerned about Iran's nuclear ambitions and is committed to cooperating on a diplomatic solution.

-- EUCOM Deputy Commander Gen Charles Wald utilized his visit to Ankara January 17 to discuss the military implications of a nuclear Iran. Deputy Chief of the General Staff Gen. Isik Kosaner agreed that Turkey shared the USG's concern about Iran's nuclear ambitions and acknowledged that the EU-3

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process had failed. Noting Iran's feeling of isolation and insecurity, Kosaner stressed that persuasion and diplomacy would work better than pressure and the use of force.

-- Ambassador and British Ambassador Westmacott used a January 18 meeting with Deputy FM Tuygan on other subjects to register US and UK concerns on Iran and urge stronger Turkish support of diplomatic efforts to persuade Iran to abandon its nuclear program and cooperate with the international community. Tuygan said that Turkey supports US and EU diplomacy on Iran, but declined to indicate what Turkey might further do or say on the issue.

15. (S) Your visit will support the recent improvement of US-Turkish relations by demonstrating our engagement with Ankara on one of the hottest issues in international affairs today. Providing the same kind of briefing we have provided to UNSC and IAEA members will be appropriate for our NATO ally Turkey and will help to shore up its support for US and EU efforts. While it is unrealistic to expect Turkey to take a leadership role on Iranian nuclear issues, we believe this kind of engagement can contribute significantly to ensuring that Ankara's attitudes and actions on the matter square with overall US goals and with the international consensus in opposition to Iranian efforts.

WILSON